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ABSTRACT

Among the provisions of the British Educational Reform Act of 1988 are arrangements for a national system of student assessment using nationally provided tests (SATs) in most subjects and formal teacher assessment to complement information from the externally provided assessment tasks. How teachers are reacting to these reforms was studied through visits to 9 schools in 1991 and again in 1992 and student questionnaire responses from 48 schools in each of the 2 years. The 1993 teacher boycott of SATs, a symptom of teacher resistance to imposition of an assessment paradigm that was at odds with the ideology of the majority of teachers, was a clear indicator of teacher reaction. Study findings show that there has been a great deal of less dramatic resistance. Teachers both overtly resisted the assessment demands and covertly subverted them when they thought it was in the best interests of their students. Students, championed by teachers, are calling the shots about assessment. The reduction of testing following the boycott and the establishment of a review of assessment policy should result in improved programs. One figure illustrates types of assessment. (Contains 3 references.) (SLD)

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PACE

PRIMARY ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM AND EXPERIENCE

A study of educational change under the National Curriculum

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NATIONAL ASSESSMENT: WHO CALLS THE SHOTS?

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Finding the Keys to Educational Reform: Insights from the Implementation of a National Curriculum and Assessment Programme

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NATIONAL ASSESSMENT: WHO CALLS THE SHOTS?

Introduction

The British government passed the Education Reform Act[1] in 1988. Among the many provisions of this landmark in educational legislation were arrangements for a national system of student assessment. The main elements of the system included:

1) nationally-provided 'tests' (SATs) in most subjects at the end of each 'key-stage' of learning within the National Curriculum - age 7, age 11, age 14 and age 16;

2) formal teacher assessments to complement the information generated by the externally-provided assessment tasks.

Assessments were to be made and recorded against each of the different Attainment Targets into which the curriculum for each subject was divided. For students who were not at the end of a 'key-stage', the Act required teachers to keep detailed records of students' achievements together with supporting evidence to justify their assessments which they could produce if requested to by a parent. Following the Act, schools were required to report annually to parents in written form. The reports were to give a detailed commentary on progress in each subject and, at the end of the Key Stage, to report the levels achieved by the student in each subject. In addition to the communication of information concerning the achievement of individual students to their parents, schools were required to provide aggregated data concerning their overall profile of results. These data were collected by Local Education Authorities and published as 'league tables' of their relative achievements.

This very brief sketch of the system of National Assessment envisaged in the 1988 Act is not intended to include the mass of detailed requirements associated with it nor the many frequent changes which have characterized its operation in subsequent years in the light of practical experience of its implementation. Rather the purpose it to emphasize the scale of the contrast between primary school teachers' existing assessment practice prior to the 1988 Act and what they were required to do under the provisions. In requiring teachers to implement externally derived tests, and in imposing on them externally determined requirements for recording and reporting children's progress and achievement, standardized National Assessment represented what was arguably the most novel, the most coercive and the most difficult part of the 1988 Act's provisions to implement.

The clear intention of the Act was to use assessment as a key instrument for educational reform. By requiring teachers to make formal, apparently standardised assessment of their students' achievements, the Act's provisions provided for such information to be in the public domain rather than largely in the hands of teachers as it had been in the past. By further providing a common yardstick on which national and institutional comparisons could be based, the Act established a mechanism for accountability unparalleled in the recent history of English education. A final twist to the reform screw was the encouragement of competition between schools through the Act's creation of greater parental choice. In short, following a strategy all too familiar in the United States, the government's aim was to make National Assessment the key mechanism for delivering its desired changes in terms of both the content and the standards of education.

National Assessment was to provide a new language with which to communicate achievement; a new set of norms on which to base accountability and a new currency of value on which to base the market between schools. The reform strategy chosen was thus one in which power was to be exercised both from the centre and by the customer. The Government was 'to call the shots' in regulating both the content of the National Curriculum and detailed requirements for the assessment, recording and reporting of student achievement in relation to it. The customers - that is parents - were to reinforce this reform strategy by being encouraged to exercise their rather different power as

consumers to choose schools on the basis of their success in relation to the centrally-generated indices of quality which National Assessment results represented. This is a reform scenario in which teachers and students are cast as walk on parts, their role being to respond as best they can and, if successful, to be rewarded. They do not create the action; they do not 'call the shots'.

Now that some eight years have elapsed since the passing of the 1988 Act, we are well placed to weigh up the success of this reform policy. As part of the general theme of this symposium on 'finding the keys to educational reform'. this paper will present some of the findings concerning the implementation of National Assessment from a project which has been monitoring the realisation of the 1988 Act's intentions in primary schools during that whole period. In describing some of the important and fundamental changes which have taken place in the practice of assessment in English primary schools, the paper will examine how far the government's original reform rationale based on communication, accountability and competition has been realised. Who, in practice, has 'called the shots' in the process of educational change?

The salience of this question can be brought into even sharper focus by a brief elaboration of the significance for teachers of the changes in assessment practice that the Act required. Whereas 'assessment' for English primary teachers and their students had typically meant the informal, continuous and often intuitive process of monitoring students' performance and making interpretations on which to base subsequent teaching activity, National Assessment procedures required them to formalise this process into one based on the explicit collection and labelling of evidence, on explicit acts of assessment and on categoric reporting of children's achievements in terms of a national scale. In negotiating this change from informal and covert assessment to more formal and explicit assessment we found that teachers sought various ways to 'protect' their pupils where the provisions of the Act were in conflict with their professional judgement. Indeed, we found that in trying to fulfil the new obligations being placed upon them, teachers coped with an almost overwhelming burden of work and that many of the assumptions inherent in the Act's provisions were misconceived or impractical because they were not grounded in existing practice and classroom constraints. Perhaps most important of all, we found that the ideology of dedication to children; of the commitment to doing their best for every child socially and emotionally as well as academically, which was the defining characteristic of the teachers in our study, provided the foundation for a professionalism which was not easily commanded or changed. Thus the formal assessment and reporting requirements of the Education Reform Act which culminated in the publication of league tables of relative school performance, represented the biggest single challenge to the understanding, the values and the professional power of English primary school teachers. Their boycott of the reporting of the 1993 Key Stage One SATs was a rare example of collective and sustained teacher resistance to the Act's provisions. As such it was the clearest possible demonstration that the formal standardised assessment required by Government provided a focus for the issues which were at stake more generally for primary schools in this reform.

In what follows, we first explore briefly the characteristics of English primary teachers' approach to and practice of assessment prior to 1988. We describe briefly the way in which teachers' attitudes and practices are changing in relation to these new requirements and the significance of this in relation to the governments' reform initiative. The second part of the paper deals with the much higher profile issue of the standardised assessment programme highlighting some of the lessons learned from this concerning the keys to educational reform. Data relating to teachers' attitudes to and practice of assessment were collected throughout the various fieldwork stages of the project (described elsewhere). The data concerning SATs are based on visits to 9 schools for two days during the administration of SATs in 1991 and again in 1992, together with questionnaire findings from our larger sample of 48 schools gathered at the end of the relevant Summer Term in each of the two years. Further data concerning the impact of the SATs was provided by means of interviews with the teachers observed and a sample of the children in each of their classrooms at these times.

How did teachers see assessment at the time of our study?

When asked what role they felt assessment ought to play in infant classrooms, teachers responses were structured around three main dimensions - frequency, purpose and mode. In terms of frequency, all of the teachers who took part in our detailed classroom studies stressed the need for assessment (and associated feedback) to be continuous and immediate - part of the on-going dialogue of teaching. Many of the teachers adopted a constructivist view of learning and talked of the continuous, intuitive, diagnostically-oriented mental process which they 'had always used'.

> "It's an integral part of the process of teaching"

> "I think that it should be diagnostic, I think it should be the teacher's way of carrying the child from A to B, noting whether you have to go from A to A1, A2, A3 before you get to B. Note whether you can skip over C because the child is good and go on to D and to record that somewhere, whether it be an internal school record informally with other colleagues that can help you and then later on to pass that information on to the next teacher, to discuss with parents how they can help if you feel that something external might be influencing what's happening in school, but purely diagnostically because the children are assessed externally. They have their reading tests, their maths test and I think that's sufficient."

In terms of purpose, the emphasis was on needing to assess in order to make pedagogic decisions.

> "We've always been assessing. As teachers we need to assess in order to know where to go next now it's written down on paper you feel more constrained."

This clear emphasis on assessment to inform teaching decisions was associated with the antipathy felt by many teachers towards National Curriculum assessment. Their essentially informal, holistic approach, was contrasted with what was perceived to be the reductionist requirements of 'ticking boxes' associated with National Curriculum assessment and was seen as making assumptions about the 'established' nature of knowledge with which many teachers could not agree. This contrast is represented diagramatically in figure 1.

Figure 1: Mode, purpose and frequency of assessment

	Assessment to support the construction of knowledge	**Assessment to monitor the acquisition of established knowledge**
Mode	Covert/Intuitive	Overt/Explicit
Purpose	Encouragement/guidance	Accountability
Frequency	Constant	Intermittent

The mode of assessment most often mentioned was that of a mental record. Perhaps the most extreme representation of this approach was those teachers who were unable to describe their approach to assessment.

> "I think we just take that for granted - I don't know that I've ever questioned that aspect of it."

> "I'd have said (assessment shouldn't have) a very big role, mainly because you've got so many other things to cope with, assessment needs to be something that should come later."

Implicit in these responses concerning the three headings of frequency, purpose and mode is a continuum of practice. At one end are those teachers for whom assessment is almost entirely an unexplicated, almost unconscious, integral part of the process of decision-making on which their teaching is based. It is implicit in their work. At the other end of the continuum are those teachers who are increasingly explicitly making a conscious and active distinction between this constant intuitive evaluation and feedback relationship and the quite separate activity of recording evidence for later use in reporting and accountability. The tension between what can be seen both as encouragement to greater structure, discipline and accountability in assessment under the legislation and its manifestation as undesirable, time-consuming, bureaucratic paper-pushing was quite marked. It was a tension that characterised many other aspects of the Education Reform Act's provisions since it reflected the changing balance of power between teachers and the Government.

A positive reflection of the Act's impact was the evidence that began to emerge of teachers beginning to use assessment creatively to support learning. Teachers were stimulated to experiment with creative new approaches to assessment as it moved increasingly centre stage in professional development and as in-service training programmes were mounted by local education authorities. Such approaches were often characterised by collaborative approaches to assessment involving pupils and parents and by the use of a wide range of techniques for gathering and storing evidence of attainment. At the same time, such developments did not appear to reflect widespread enthusiasm for change, set as they were against a background of essentially reluctant acquiescence and generally low morale. Indeed the picture that emerged during the early years of the PACE project showed much greater emphasis on formal assessment and record keeping, some considerable resentment at the time demands and the perceived unnecessary formalisation of much assessment work, fears about the potential impact of intrusive assessment and recording procedures on teaching-learning processes and concerns about relationships with parents and the students themselves. At the same time there was some evidence of the beginning of a more positive phase of development in the use of assessment, as teachers' growing confidence and knowledge allowed them to **mediate external requirements towards more professionally acceptable ends.**

The dislike of many teachers for National Assessment requirements, however, was not simply because they meant an increase in workload or required skills which teachers felt they did not have. Rather their resistance was rooted in their objection to the use of the coercive power of the law to impose on teachers the obligation to operationalise a different set of understandings concerning the role of assessment in primary schooling. This conflict of understanding in turn reflected a fundamental challenge to the values typically held by primary school teachers concerning how children can best be helped to learn and the particular role of assessment in this respect. Most teachers' ideology is likely to be a mixture of different elements, their practice informed by a mixture of pragmatism and habit as well as educational philosophy. By the same token, assessment practice is likely to reflect a similar mixture of influences. This reinforces the importance of understanding the relationship between teachers' views and practice of assessment and their more general professional understanding. For it is only with such an appreciation that the true significance of the conflict between Government and teachers to which the imposition of National Assessment has led can fully be understood.

In considering changes in teachers' chosen assessment practices, it is important to consider the extent to which teachers found it possible to integrate National Assessment requirements within their professional practice and whether this reflected a change in their educational values and understandings or rather a change in the values and understandings implicit in National Assessment itself as these were originally conceived, in the process of its realization in the classroom. On the answer to this question rest not only the long-term outcomes that may be predicted from the imposition of National Assessment per se, but

also, given that the assessment requirements of the Education Reform Act arguably represent the most explicit expression of the ideology on which it is based and the most powerful mechanism for imposing this ideology on schools and teachers, the fate of the whole reform initiative itself. The way in which National Assessment comes to be realized in practice is at the apex of the power struggle between government and the teaching profession. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in relation to the contentious issue of SATs.

Teachers' responses to SATs

The SATs for Key Stage 1 (7 year olds) were originally designed to mirror typical infant classroom activities.. The design of the tasks was such as to emphasise validity and attractiveness to children, their potential as teaching activities emphasising their 'authentic' character. In 1991 for example the most (in)famous task required children to test a large number of different objects to see if they would float or sink and then to record the results. The problems of manageability which teachers encountered in setting up and regulating this 'test' in a standardised way with a series of small groups in turn were typical of the problems they encountered in all the SATs, they were also typical of those faced by task designers in providing interesting and rewarding tasks which were nevertheless capable of a level of standardisation sufficient to provide meaningful achievement data.

Many studies have reported the practical problems of time and resources which were encountered in this attempt at implementing 'authentic' assessment for seven year olds in a standardised way. The vociferous complaints which both the pilot study and the first proper year of testing in 1991 produced concerning the manageability of the assessments for teachers has led in each successive year to more formalised and controlled assessment arrangements such that in 1994 these will be more like traditional examinations.

And yet it remains doubtful whether the major source of variability is being addressed. Our data suggests that at least as significant is the influence of teachers' professional ideology in the conduct of the task and in the interpretation of the standard of the work produced.

One obvious source of potential variation concerns the person who conducts the tests, since children are likely to be more at ease with someone they know. The stage of SAT administration was also significant in that teachers were variously tense, confident and relaxed, or bored, depending on how many times they had administered the SAT.

However, perhaps the most significant issue in this respect was whether or not the teacher made the reality of testing explicit to the children and what consequences this decision may have had. In some cases the SAT was presented as a game, in others as a learning activity, and in a few as a test. In many classrooms if an observer had not known what was going on he or she would not have realised that some children were involved in an assessment activity.

In one classroom in 1992 the teacher was so concerned about the impact of the Maths 3 SAT in particular, involving the pressure of both timing and categoric, right or wrong answers, that she was prepared to undertake testing the children on a one-to-one basis in a class of 30 even though this caused major administrative problems. Indeed, it is an illustration of the strength of the teacher's commitment to protect the children from anxiety and from a feeling of failure that she was prepared to engage in such a lengthy period of testing in which there was relatively little teaching for the rest of the class.

Where the tests had become more explicit - such as timed mental arithmetic, for example, in an effort to achieve greater reliability, this produced a greater tension and anxiety in the children and a greater awareness of failure, which some teachers took great pains to counteract by a variety of subterfuges. The rather unorthodox implementation of the Maths 3 SATs in one school in 1992 bears out this argument to some extent:

The teacher said:

> "We're going to start off nice and easy so Ben won't get his worried face, and Amy won't get her frown." (Funny expressions on the teacher's face)
>
> "To help you, you'll have these sheets."

He reads out:

> "4 + 2 Ugh! (pulls a face, encouraging the children to 'have a go') 2 + 3 Ugh!"

The teacher says:

> "They're very easy. As soon as you've finished, turn over your paper and take out your puzzle book. You won't need to look at anyone else's because they're *so* easy. Don't worry if you get left behind. It's only a bit of fun and we'll have another competition later. So, remember the rules: no looking at anyone else's, no showing anyone else. When you've finished I'll come round and give team points."

After conducting the SAT, the teacher concludes with:

> "I think I made that too easy. I'm going to have to give out lots of house points. If you like that puzzle, shall we try that again on Monday with some harder sums?"

Children: "Yes, yes."

While this teacher successfully presented the Maths 3 SAT as a game or competition which the children appeared to enjoy, the other Year 2 teacher in the same school took a different approach. She carried out the same SAT in a straightforward way, more like a 'mental arithmetic' test. She commented that the children tightened up a lot, sat back in their seats, drawing in their breath, and appeared rather stressed. "It was so unlike the way we normally work," she commented.

This lack of standardisation in the presentation of SATs, even within one school was not unusual.

Such presentational differences were more than matched by differences in the amount of help given and time allowed to students.

Some children received much more help than others in the same classroom; some teachers gave more help and were more generous in their interpretation of the criteria than others. Despite the strict instructions surrounding the Maths 3 1992 test, for example, in which the context for testing and the criteria of performance were unambiguously defined, we observed many variations in the way in which teachers actually introduced and judged the SATs. Some were very flexible in the timing allowed for doing the sums; others allowed children more than one attempt at the task, or provided aids in the form of flash cards. Some allowed children to count on their fingers or to shout out answers, even though this was explicitly not allowed.

Conversely, in some cases, the teacher may have given less help than she was allowed to offer. For instance, at one school a teacher's anguish was recorded in the field-notes made by members of the research team:

> The teacher seemed quite upset as she looked at each completed Maths sheet. She named children who 'can do it' but feels they've 'got muddled up or something'. There was speculation:

"Oh dear, I think they can get one wrong but I'll have to check. It means I won't have many Level 2s. They'll all be Level 1s. I think I may have done it wrong."

The teacher checked the Teacher Book for procedures and discovered that she should have helped the children to write in a first example of the task. This was the one where the children have to give change, that has caught out most children.

In the staffroom for coffee, the teacher studied the Teachers' Book to check for further details. She decided that she would ask individual children to think about their answers to Maths 3 in the afternoon "to see if the penny drops. Well, they can do it, I know - but they haven't done it and I should have helped them more, so we'll see if they can do it now."

There was a lot of sympathy. One teacher commented: "What is it all for?"
Other teachers replied: "It's for the parents. It doesn't help us at all."

The teacher in this example was not trying to cheat; she simply wanted the test to reflect validly what she felt the children could do. Feeling that it did not, she was prepared to manipulate the situation. The fieldnotes record, later:

The teacher had spent the afternoon checking children who had "not understood what to do in the morning". She judged that six children had been able to pass Level 2 in fact - because they had succeeded when the example was explained.

Our fieldnotes record several examples of teachers giving differential degrees of help to different children and groups or interpreting performance in ways not explicitly permitted by the regulations because they felt that the child in question was truly worthy of a particular level. As one teacher explained "I just rubbed it (the answer) all out because there's no way he isn't a Level 2".

Teachers' judgement as to how much help is acceptable and appropriate in the context of the SAT regulations is an interesting illustration of the overlay of professional behaviour in what is supposed to be a standardised testing situation. It would seem to be a fundamental issue, in any such attempt to provide more authentic testing whether sources of variability in the testing context, such as those described above, can ever be removed (Abbott et al, 1993)[2]

Teachers were anxious to make the assessment tasks as stress-free as possible for children and drew on their professionalism and judgement to do so, in particular by providing extensive encouragement.

On several occasions we observed SATs being administered as a game or competition. For instance, one teacher approached the assessment of Maths 3 in the following way in 1992:

"We've all got to start together to make it fair, so put your name on it, but don't start yet. To help you, you can use number trail or counters. It's only a bit of fun to make up some points."

"When I count to three you can start - but no-one must see yours. Otherwise it won't be a fair competition. Don't forget the counters if you need them."

Teacher efforts to reduce student awareness and anxiety of assessment were skilful, creative and well intentioned - but they did not always contribute to standardisation.

In other cases, however, it was not possible for teachers either to allay children's anxiety or to reduce the awareness of a testing situation. In some cases, this was because the children were already anxious, and aware of what was involved, before the test.

The lack of clarity in assessment criteria produced some highly questionable results, and this was compounded by the difficulty then posed for teachers in judging the standard of work which was appropriate for each level. Whilst National Assessment levels were intended by TGAT to be criterion referenced, the reality of their interpretation was sometimes more pragmatic or normative.

It is pertinent to stress here that teachers' constructive interpretation of the testing rules did not appear to be caused by a desire to raise their results in a high stakes context - to produce a better position for their school in league tables, for instance. On the contrary, several teachers expressed their concern at giving children what might be flattering scores which would cause a problem for their colleagues in subsequent years. Teachers' worries over SAT results, and their anxiety that children should do well, also appeared to be bound up with their own sense of professional competence being at stake than with fear of the effect of poor results on themselves or the school.

Many teachers reported that children could be assessed as being at the same SAT level, even when the teacher felt they were really at very different levels of development.

> 'Well, he's managed all of these so I must record him as Level 3 but he's not really a Level 3 child.'

Indeed, most teachers appeared have a view of their students' achievement which was not affected by the evidence provided by SATs.

In answer to the question: 'Do you feel that the SATs give an accurate picture of the child's level of achievement?' the following responses by two teachers were typical:

> 'Yes, I do actually think it's accurate, yes. But it gave the picture that you expect it to give, because I think you in many ways work it out so that it does. For instance, those three children on Maths 3 that didn't reach Level 2 and I reassessed them, I reassessed them because I felt certain that they were Level 2. I haven't reassessed two other children that in my heart of hearts I didn't feel were Level 2. So I think that it gave the result that you expect it to give.'

Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers observed also said that they had been surprised to find that some children achieved higher levels than they had anticipated. In 1991, 60% of teachers said they had learned some new things from the conduct of SATs, although this dropped to 35% in 1992.

How far teachers were successful in achieving their goal of protecting children from what they perceived to be the harmful effects of formal assessment may be judged by students' reactions.

Students' reactions to SATs

In both 1991 and 1992, 74% of children spoke positively about their SAT experiences, 18% had mixed views and only 8% expressed negative feelings. Even the negative feelings were not those of acute anxiety or competitiveness however. More typically they related specifically to the nature of the task itself.

> 'OK. I was enjoying it. Didn't enjoy the writing down 'cos it was difficult and I didn't know how to do the second part.'

> 'I like doing stories, but not that much. Because you have to do a lot of work to do it. Like you're doing so many, of words and it's like that you've got to write and do your work quickly and there's a lot you have to do'.

'I felt nervous doing it - didn't want to make a fool of myself spilling pegs and didn't want the boys to laugh at me. I felt quite happy because I was chosen to play the game'.

'Not much fun. I liked seeing what was floating and sinking better. 'Cos this time we had to stay sitting and I like moving and getting up and going to other tables and doing things'.

When asked why they were doing these tasks, student responses typically indicated a connection with -

learning:

'To learn about things that sink and to learn about grams and weights and to see if we could manage to write all the things down'

'Cos he wanted us to learn, Miss. To do our shoelaces properly and our ties properly. When you are 18 and you get a job and you have to wear a tie, you can't say, "Mum will you do it for me?"'

'Cos, if you want to grow up to be a teacher you can learn to do it and if you've got children of your own you can learn them.'

'So when we're in that (junior) class we'll know how to do it - say we do something similar to it, it might be the same - and if we don't do it - when we go in the next class - kerboom! Out! We won't be able to do it'

or with enjoyment

'Because we like doing games and she thought we'd like to do some more - nice for us'

'No he was trying to make us feel better and happy. He was making a game'

'Because he wants to see which team will get the most house-points. The winning team gets lollipops and goes to the library first'

'It was a really good game. Miss could give it to a game-making company - they could sell it to a shop'.

46% of students in 1992 reported that the purpose of the SAT activities was to assist their learning.

Only 18% of students in 1992 were aware that these activities were assessment, giving responses like -

Regarding more explicit *awareness of assessment*, the children's comments included the following:

'It was one of our tests. We're doing tests now and nearly everything we do is a test. It's to see which Level we got on - 1, 2 or 3 and to see how good we are and what we'll be like in the next class'

Discussion

The 1993 teacher boycott of SATs was the tip of a much larger iceberg of professional resistance to the imposition of an assessment paradigm which was at odds with the professional ideology of the majority of English primary school teachers. The crisis was resolved by an immediate reduction by the government in the amount of formal testing required for 1993 and the setting up of a major review of National Curriculum and Assessment arrangements under the Chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing[3]. The Final Report of this review recommends a return to a greater measure of autonomy for teachers so that they can exercise their professional judgement more effectively. In relation to the assessment arrangements in particular, it recommends:

- simplifying the national tests and reducing the time they require;
- providing materials to guide teacher assessment;
- reducing the requirement for statutory teacher assessment to cover only the core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) in primary schools;
- reducing the burden of record-keeping for primary schools.

The Report has been endorsed by the government which is now working on ways of implementing its recommendations.

In our study of the evolution of National Assessment practice in England and Wales during the post '88 period, we have been able to learn a great deal about assessment practices in English primary schools and how these are changing in response to external pressures. It is clear that the assessment requirements of the Act have been the most controversial and the focal point of resistance to it. They have culminated, in 1993 in the unprecedented event of a teacher boycott. However, most of the resistance we have documented has been much less dramatic than this, rooted in the covert and often unconscious influence of teachers' professional ideology. Whilst the impact of the potentially more 'high-stakes' assessment at Key Stage 2 is yet to be felt (it is being piloted in 1994) as is the possible impact of the new 'streamlined' tests for seven year olds. Experience to date nevertheless provides us with a clear conclusion about 'who calls the shots' as far as National Assessment is concerned. It is the students - their need to learn; their need to have their self-confidence protected; their need to enjoy learning. Their champions are their teachers who by their more or less conscious application of their professional judgement concerning how best to serve these ends have transformed the reform process. Thus these data suggest that an important key to educational reform is the key that can unlock the way to influence the professional values and understandings of teachers. Even in what is clearly a 'high stakes' context, teachers will both overtly resist the imposition of policy requirements that go against their professional understandings and covertly subvert such requirements in order that they are more in harmony with professional understanding. Whilst this point has long been understood in relation to curriculum development, evidence that it also applied as far as assessment is concerned may be of considerable significance in influencing the prominent place currently being given internationally to assessment policy as an instrument of educational reform. As Marshal McLuhan so famously said, 'The medium is the message.' [Understanding Media (1964) Part One Chapter 1.]

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